Time Savers

FOR SMART GARDENERS

by the Editors of
Organic Gardening

Time Savers for Smart Gardeners

By the Editors of
ORGANIC GARDENING®
Magazine

Contents

	Introduction	3
1.	Soil, Compost and Mulches	5
2.	Germination and Planting	12
3.	Plant Protection	16
4.	Irrigation	18
5.	Food Preparation and Storage	22
6.	Tools	25

Copyright 1984
Rodale Press, Inc. Emmaus, PA 18049
Second Printing 1985

Introduction

"Wouldn't it be wonderful," said the young robotics engineer, "if you could just push a few buttons on your home computer and have all those time-consuming gardening chores taken care of by a couple of robot gardeners. They'd plow and plant, mulch and cultivate. They'd know just when to water and when to harvest. They'd even patrol the garden at night. Think of all the time you'd save!"

Well, maybe. But think of what might be lost if this hi-tech pipe dream came true (and why we're pretty sure that it won't): the direct, intuitive relationship between people and plants—the thing that makes gardening more art than industry—would be broken. The satisfaction that comes from caring for and nurturing and fussing over a plot of ground would be gone. And the necessity to invent—that basic human response to new and challenging situations—would begin to fade. The lore of gardening, enriched by the contributions of countless individuals over the years, would become an impersonal, unchanging manual of technical information.

Luckily it's humans, not robots, who are still doing the gardening. Which is why, in this collection of time-saving tips sent in by the readers of ORGANIC GARDENING, you won't find the gardening versions of R2D2 and C3PO. You'll find instead a broken fork, an old laundry basket, a piece of hose, even an old golf club cart among other things, all put to new and imaginative uses around the garden. Which is not to say that gardeners can't recognize the benefits of "hi-tech" when they see them: a vacuum cleaner, a food processor and a microwave oven are in this collection too. The love of gardening marches on!

We hope you find our time-saving tips—well—time-saving. We also hope you find a few of them worth passing on to your grandchildren.

Chapter 1

Soil, Compost and Mulches

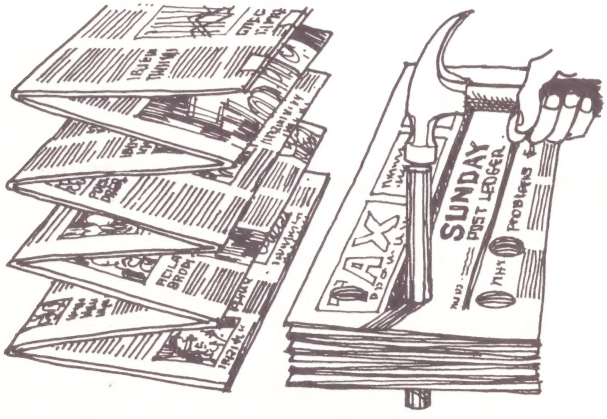
New Angle on Sifted Soil

I use a minnow trap as an effective, durable, easily handled soil sifter. Unlike the mesh on most homemade soil sifters, the quarter-inch steel mesh on the minnow trap extends all the way up the sides as well as covering the bottom. Because of the additional mesh area, sifting goes really fast. These traps can be purchased for a few dollars at most fishing-tackle shops.

Mike Lieberman
Berne, New York

Onions in the News

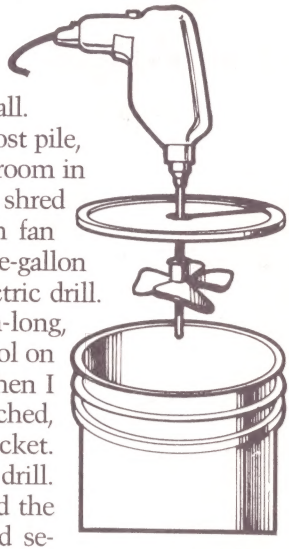
When my onion sets go in the ground, I don't have to worry about mulching and spacing them. A few minutes' stapling, taping and punching newspaper has it all taken care of. I take three sheets of newspaper and staple them into one thick sheet. I tape a number of



them together to make one long sheet. Then I punch holes in the paper four inches apart with a sharpened piece of one-inch-diameter duct pipe and a hammer. To make the hole-cutting faster, I fold the paper into accordion pleats. Just 21 holes punched in the folded sheet gives me 735 spaces for sets on the 35-foot sheet paper. At planting time, I weigh the paper down over the bed with rocks and soil, then put one set in each hole. The paper lets in water but keeps out most of the weeds, and I don't have to worry about measuring out spacing in the garden. In the fall, I just till the paper under.

Clarence Jandecha
Berea, Ohio

Fan Shredder



I collected a bumper crop of leaves last fall. After I'd put most of them on my compost pile, I still had 10 bags. They were taking up room in my garage until I thought of a way to shred them. I had an old fan with a six-inch fan blade (the motor was burned out), a five-gallon plastic bucket with a cover, and an electric drill. I attached the fan blade to a 16-inch-long, quarter-inch-diameter rod. I placed a spool on the rod directly above the fan blade. Then I inserted the rod, with the fan blade attached, through the hole in the cover of the bucket. Next I attached the rod to my power drill. After I had these parts assembled, I filled the bucket with dry leaves, fastened the lid securely to the bucket, and started to shred. It took me only about a minute to shred a batch of leaves using an up-and-down motion. My 10 bags were shredded to one!

Bernard Schroeder
Chicago, Illinois

Putting Down Newspaper

We've found an easy way to lay down newspaper mulch, even on a windy day. During the winter we staple papers together end to end, and roll them into paper logs. The logs are easy to store, and when planting season comes, we just unroll the papers on the row and cover them with mulch.

Dale Ablard
Milaca, Minnesota

Garden Carpet

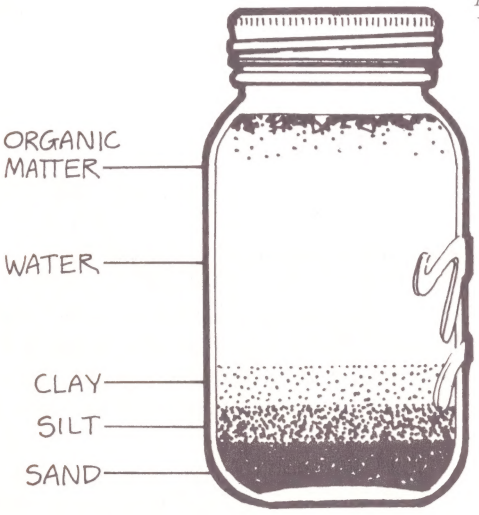
Used jute-back carpet is the best mulch I've found. It doesn't mold and can be used year after year. I was lucky enough to get 16 rooms' worth of carpet from a hotel free for the hauling. I cut the carpet in strips wide enough to fit between my garden rows. I didn't have to weed the garden once, and the vegetables were protected from the ground. I could even go into the garden right after a hard rain. After the frost hit, garden cleanup was easier than ever. I just rolled up the carpet strips and stored them at the end of the rows, ready to roll out again this spring.

Bonnie Burkhardt
Jefferson, Iowa

Soil Shake

An easy way to find out what kind of soil texture you have is to fill a jar with two-thirds water and one-third soil, then give it a good shake. Put the jar on a windowsill where you can observe the results without disturbing it. The heavy sand particles will settle first, followed by silt and then clay. Organic matter will float. In a few days, all the clay particles will have settled out and you can make your "analysis." Good loam contains about 45% sand, 35% silt and 20% clay. If more than 70% of your soil sample settles in the bottom layer, your soil is sand. If a third or more rises to the top, you have clay. If you've been improving your garden soil and want to see how far you've come, take a second sample from "unimproved" ground nearby.

Mary Jost
Van Nuys, California



Mow 'Em Down

Two dedicated organic gardeners I know came up with the same solution to their biggest problem, lack of time: they mow their weeds instead of mulching. Not only does it save time gathering mulch materials, but it cuts the time and energy spent spreading mulch once it's found.

Both women have small 12 hp. tractors for chores and lawn mowing, so each arranged her garden with enough room between vegetable rows for the tractor to pass between. By summer, when lamb's quarters, pigweed and the like claimed neighbors' gardens, both women mowed between their rows. By August, the constantly mowed weeds formed a light sod which seemed to hold rather than deplete the soil moisture. One gardener now plans to fertilize only the vegetable rows, allowing a permanent sod to form. The other will also fertilize in narrow rows, but plans to change the location of the rows yearly.

Mary Leister
Sykesville, Maryland

Drywall Soil

Leftover drywall or gypsum board doesn't have to be thrown out. It can be used as a mulch, for walkways, and as a soil additive in your garden. Sheets cut easily with a sharp knife. I used it as mulch and for paths, and tilled it under when the season ended. If it's still hard, a good soaking with the hose will make it soft and pliable the next day. It loosened my compacted soil in just one year.

Dayna McDaniel
Lee's Summit, Missouri

Blender Compost

When I lived in an apartment, my gardening space was very limited, and there was just no room for a compost pile. So I decided to put my blender to work. As kitchen scraps accumulated, I put them in the blender, added enough water to cover, then blended until the stuff was quite finely chopped. Then I poured the "liquid compost" into a bucket with a lid and dumped it into trenches I dug in the garden. Finally, I put a scoop of dirt over each bucketful. It decomposed fast, giving my garden the benefits of compost without taking up precious space.

Carla A. Ramsey
Fair Lawn, New Jersey

Sunflower Kindling

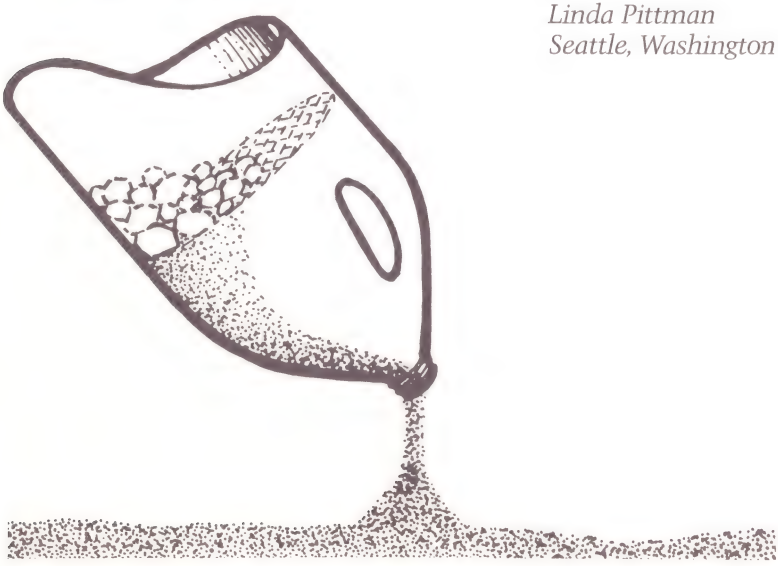
Composting sunflower stalks without a shredder can take a *long* time. I'd rather use the stalks as kindling! After harvesting the seed heads for bird food and snacks, I strip the leaves for the compost pile and leave the bare stems standing until they are dry and brittle. Then I either break or saw the stalks down to kindling size.

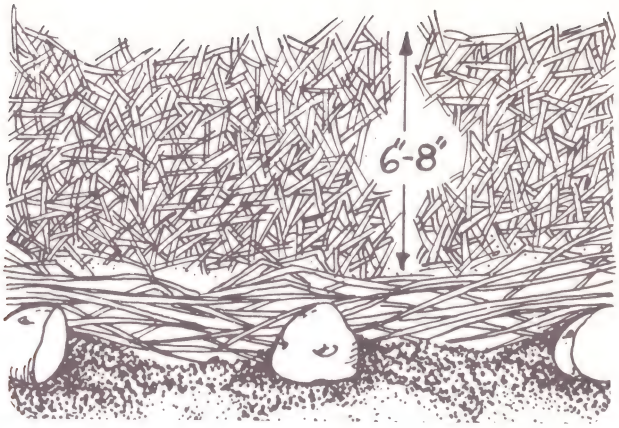
Mrs. Tom Potter
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Bleach-Bottle Sifter

When I took over the old garden plot of our new home, it was full of stones that needed to be sifted out. I wanted a sifter that would make the job quicker and easier than the conventional flat screen. I came up with the idea of cutting the bottom off a bleach bottle at a slant, to make a scoop, and inserting a six-inch-diameter piece of quarter-inch hardware cloth so that it rested right above the handle hole. I can hold the bottle upside down and scoop up the dirt, sifting the stone-free earth out the narrow top opening. The stones remain inside on top of the hardware cloth and can easily be tossed into a nearby container. All with one hand! I've found this sifter especially useful for sifting earth on top of newly planted seed, since the narrow opening allows me to direct it right where I want it and to see exactly how much earth covers each seed.

Linda Pittman
Seattle, Washington





Potatoes Do the Digging

You can start or expand a garden on sod with little effort by using potatoes. Put seed potatoes in rows directly on the ground. If the grass is very tall, flatten it over the potatoes. Then cover everything with a six- to eight-inch layer of mulch. The potatoes grow very well, needing almost no care other than more mulch to keep them well covered. We get excellent crops, and after the potatoes are harvested the ground is soft, moist, and ready to work. This method eliminates the work of chopping holes in the turf or digging into a heavy mulch to set plants or seed.

Judy F. Davis
Chandler, Illinois

Speedy Sterilized Soil

While scooping out some potting soil from a bag that had been around for a while, I noticed that it was infested with bugs. I needed some sterile soil right away, so I had to find a fast solution. I didn't want to use a pesticide and didn't want the smell and mess of baking the soil in the oven. I decided to try the microwave. I filled a large plastic bag (about one-and-one-half-gallon size) with soil and sealed it with a rubber band. Don't use a wire tie, it melts plastic. After punching five or six holes, I put the bag in the oven at full power for four or five minutes, turning it once or twice. The soil came out almost too hot to touch, so I opened the bag and spread it out to cool off. As far as I could tell, the soil was perfectly sterile, and my seeds sprouted with no ill effects from the process.

Dave Hall
Crete, Greece

Even Lawns Like Beer

One of our biggest fall chores used to be the dethatching of our lawn. This semi-annual chore would always yield four or five pick-up loads of dry grass, which we used to mulch approximately 500 feet of evergreen and fruit hedges. The hedges are now large enough to shade the ground, thus discouraging the growth of weeds and grass. Meanwhile, we have found a better way to dethatch the lawn. We use beer! Bottles or cans are opened and allowed to set overnight to allow the beer to go flat. Then, it is applied to the lawn with a hose-end sprayer at the rate of one hose-end bottle (approximately a pint) to 500 square feet of lawn.

Something in the beer appears to start a chain reaction that results in rapid decomposition of the thatch—a procedure that works best in hot, humid weather, and only when the soil is moist and warm. The process does no harm to the lawn and our earthworms seem to thrive on the decomposed thatch—or could it be the beer?

H.G. Lendle
Liberty, Missouri

Chapter 2

Germination and Planting

Hot Box

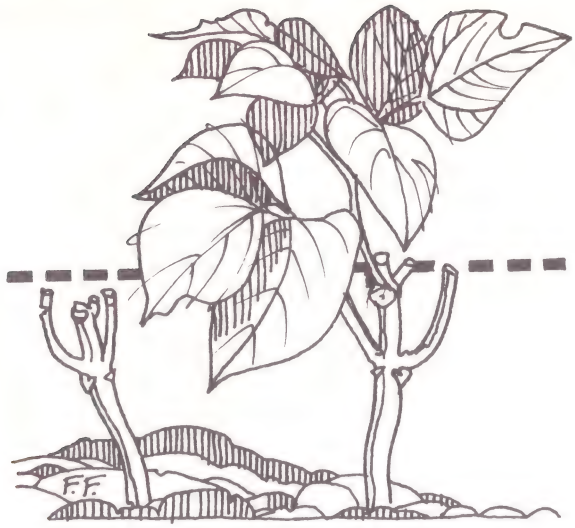
An easy way to get seedlings up faster is to use hot water in a cooler chest. I put seed trays in my 48-quart cooler, leaving about five inches of open space in the center. Then I fill a large zip-type plastic bag with hot tap water and place it in the open space. I close the lid, and the heat from the water warms the cooler and seeds for six to eight hours. I change the water three or four times a day, and my seedlings are up in no time—tomatoes in five days, sweet peppers in seven days, and marigolds in six days (all of them usually take 10 to 14 days!).

Mrs. Laurie Say
Independence, Missouri

Germinating Jello

For planting tiny seeds evenly (carrots, turnips, etc.), I've had great success sowing them in a liquid medium. I prepare an applicator by removing the pull-up part of a clean liquid-detergent bottle cap. Then I mix one package of plain gelatin with one tablespoon of warm water until dissolved. Add water sparingly until mixture is thick enough so the seeds don't sink and thin enough to flow evenly. You must experiment with the number of seeds to put in the gel. Squeeze a little out of the bottle to check for the spacing. Add more until they come out with just the right number of seeds per inch. Then begin planting. Squeeze the mix out of the bottle as you move down each row. Shake the bottle frequently to keep the seeds evenly distributed. Cover with soil as recommended. I planted a 45-foot row in five minutes with this bottle. The turnips were up in five days.

Anne M. Dickey
Inglis, Florida



Regreened Beans

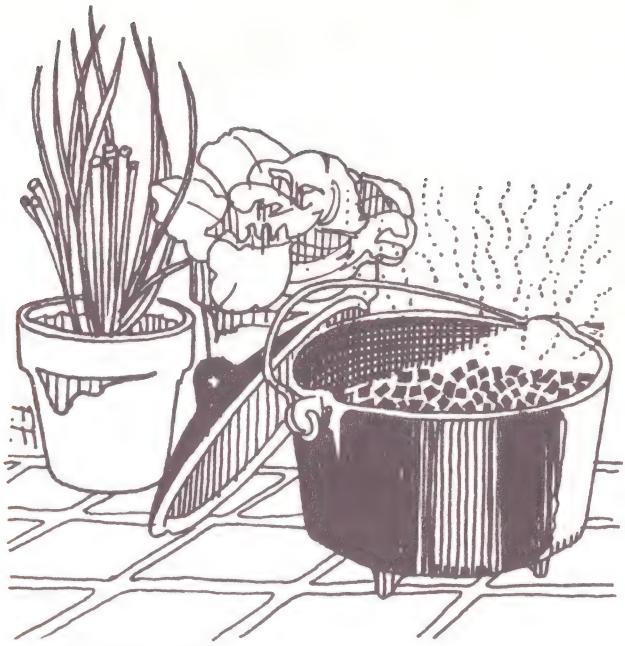
Last summer, instead of pulling my green beans out of the garden when they'd finished producing, I decided to go over them with the lawn mower. I set the mower on the highest setting, leaving three to four inches of the stems intact. After raking up the shredded stalks and putting them on the compost pile, I was going to run the rotary-tiller over the garden stubble to dig up the roots. Fortunately, a rainy spell hit, and the ground wasn't dry enough to till for about a week. When I went back to the garden, I saw that the bean-stem stumps were all sending up new shoots! I left them alone, and in about a month I was picking green beans again from the old plants. Sure beat the time and effort of replanting—all I did was side-dress the "new" plants with manure tea. Talk about cut and come again!

Larry Shields
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

Prime-Time Germinator

Here's another way to get around buying a heating cable. I germinate seeds on my TV! Sow seed as usual in peat pots or flats. Enclose the whole flat or tray in a plastic garbage bag. Stack three to five flats on top of a console television (the kind that gets warm on top when the TV's on). I rotate the flats so a different one is on the bottom every day. Seedlings are up in record time.

C. Eleanor Roland
Pasadena, Maryland



Hot Gumbo

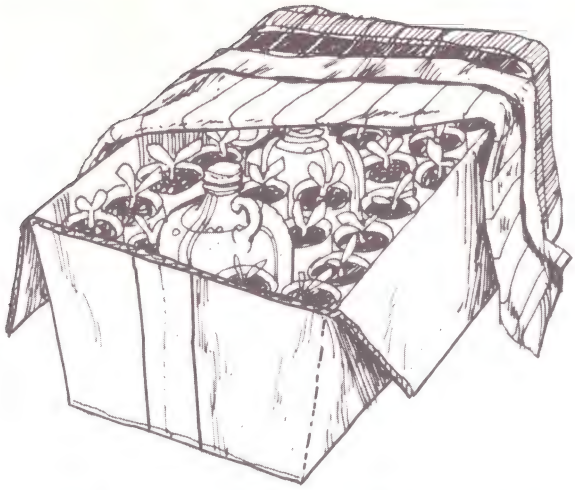
My father got okra seeds up in a hurry by putting them in a bowl and pouring boiling water over them. He let the seeds soak overnight, then planted them early the next morning before the soil had dried out. If the weather was dry, he watered the rows daily for the first three days. Works for me, too!

Esther Nethercutt
Sherwood, Arkansas

Spacing Lettuce

Lettuce seeds are so small that I always sowed them too thickly, then had to waste time and seed thinning later. Now I prepare the row for lettuce by tamping the dirt down with the flat of a hoe, six inches wide and as long as I plan to plant. Then I scoop a few handfuls of dirt into a bucket and pour in as much seed as I figure it will take to plant the row. I mix the dirt and seeds thoroughly and sprinkle it onto the row. I cover the row with a quarter-inch of dirt or peat moss and water well. No more thinning, the seeds go twice as far, and my lettuce is better than it's ever been!

Orval Straight
Olean, New York



Quicker Tomato Seedlings

I can get tomato seeds up in a week in an unheated room with a little effort and some hot water. I put two one-gallon glass jugs full of hot water in a two-by-three-foot cardboard box. I plant seeds in small cups filled with potting soil, place the cups around the jugs of hot water, and cover the box with an old blanket. I refill the jugs with hot water each morning and night.

W.J. Hodges
Maryville, Tennessee

Seed Box

We got sick of rummaging for seed packets in the bottom of a grocery bag and missing the best planting times due to our lack of organization. Now we use a partitioned carton, like a soda or liquor box, as our "seed file" and garden calendar. We sort the seeds by planting dates and label the partitions: "Indoors—Feb.," "Outdoors—April," etc. The six compartments keep packages neat, and plantings go according to schedule.

George W. Davis
Wilmington, Delaware

Chapter 3

Plant Protection

Potato Bug Detector

For the gardener who can't bend over readily, or who just plain doesn't want to, here's a great device for detecting potato bugs. Take a truck mirror and mount it on a bent handle. If you walk up and down the potato rows with this "bug detector," it's easy to see the clusters of orange eggs on the undersides of leaves. This way you only have to bend for infested leaves, not for every leaf in the patch. And inspection time is really reduced!

Alvin Sawatzki
Saginaw, Michigan

Clean Sweep

Handpicking large populations of Mexican bean beetles or squash bugs can be a real chore. I've discovered that a household vacuum cleaner can do the job quickly and thoroughly. The round upholstery brush works best, since the soft bristles don't bruise tender plants. When my "cleaning" job is finished, I shake a little rotenone inside the bag and that's that. A vacuum with an extension cord or a portable vacuum works fine. Don't use a shop vacuum, as the powerful suction from these machines is likely to damage your plants.

Bob Percival
Bloomington, Indiana

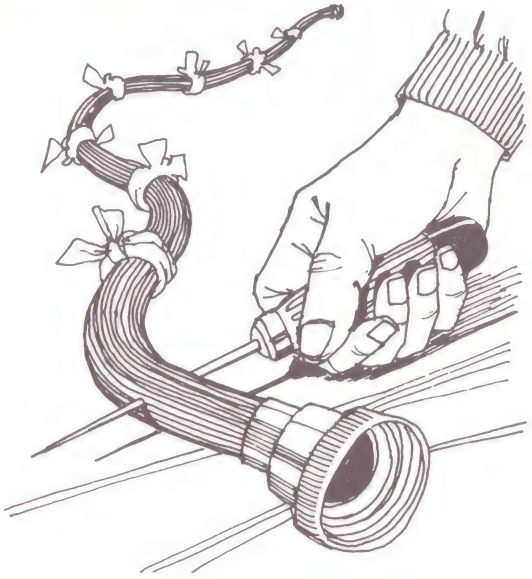
Frostproof Strawberries

Late spring frosts often threaten our strawberry blossoms. So we planted the strawberry bed (three-by-30-feet) along a fence. Once the plants were established, we attached a lightweight wooden frame to the fence about 20 inches above the ground. The shades are canvas sheets cut wide enough to cover the bed, with three-inch hems to hold broomhandle rollers. Most of the time, the shades stay rolled up against the fence, but on nights when frost threatens, it only takes a minute to roll them down over the plants.

Faye Wiegenstein
Redford, Missouri

Chapter 4

Irrigation



A Ragged Hose System

Here's how I made my own drip-irrigation system—cheap! I bought half-inch-by-50-foot plastic hoses and hose end caps, then straightened out each hose by pulling hard on the ends for a few minutes (like tug-of-war). Then I took an ice pick and poked a hole all the way through the hose about every foot. Next, I cut rags—I used old socks and underwear—into one-by-six-inch strips and tied one tight around each section of punched hose. Then all I had to do was put on an end cap, lay the hose into the bed, and turn on the water. If the water's left on low for eight hours or so, my drip hoses soak my three-by-50-foot beds a good 10 inches deep. I use a deep mulch in summer, and only have to water once a week—which is great in Reno!

Michaelyn Royer
Reno, Nevada

Skip Irrigation

For spot irrigation without supervision, I use garbage cans and jump ropes. First, I set a large (17- to 22-gallon) garbage can where I want to water, placing it up on bricks if necessary to raise the can above the watering site. I fill the can with water and put in a hollow plastic jump rope. When the rope is full of water, I plug both ends with my thumbs, then, leaving one end in the can, I put the other by the plant(s) I want to water. This starts the siphoning process, which continues until the can is empty. I put the lid on the can to keep out leaves. This way I don't have to stand over the plants with a hose, and I know exactly how much water they're getting. The water runs out easily, so it seeps into the soil immediately. In the winter, I use the cans to store carrots, soil, sand and compost.

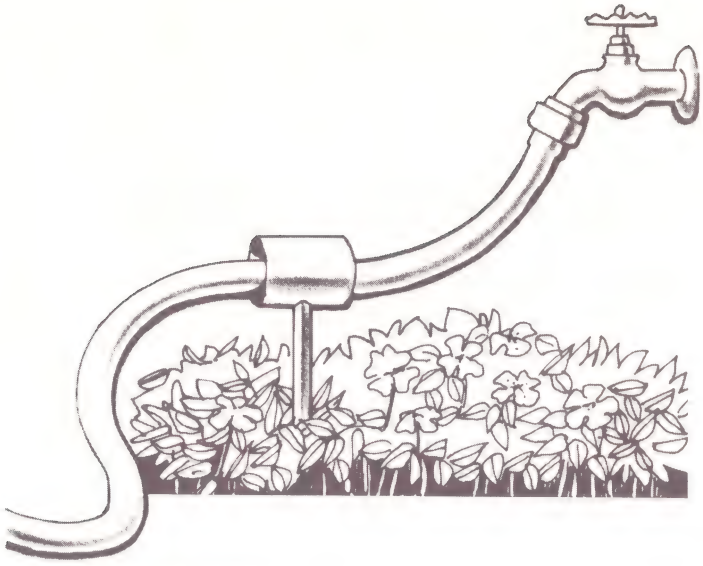
Evelyn Deal
Oungre, Saskatchewan, Canada

Three Guesses???

Hint: It's a direct route to watering and fertilizing your plants and at the same time, it's a plant stake. It can also be used to protect the handles of your golf clubs. What is it?

If you guessed plastic golf tubes, you're right! These nifty tubes have been channeling water and fertilizer straight to the roots of my tomato plants for years. The tubes' narrow length allows water to soak in slowly and discourages rapid evaporation. In addition, the plants enjoy using the sturdy tube as a leaning and climbing post.

Dick Ferris
Colorado Springs, Colorado



Hose Holder

My garden hose attaches to a faucet on the side of my house right over the flower border. Every time I had to use the hose, it dragged all over my plants, crushing the delicate flowers I'd worked so hard to establish. Now I save my border with a tin can. I cut both ends out of the can and soldered it to a three-eighths-inch rod 36 inches long. The rod is round so it can turn easily as the direction of the hose changes. I just stick the hose through the can and put the rod in the ground. The hose is held off my flowers, and when I'm through watering, the whole thing can be taken down in a flash.

H.G. Kobes
Orange City, Iowa

Chapter 5

Food Preparation and Storage

Mechanized Thresher

We've found that the ideal way to thresh small lots of grain is to use a lawn mower! Stake a heavy tarp (the larger the better) tight to the ground. Plug the side discharge on the mower to keep the grain from being thrown. To make sure none gets away, you can stake plywood barriers at the edge of the canvas. Raise the mower blade as high as possible. We threshed out a six-inch-deep "carpet" of wheat on a 20-by-20-foot canvas in about 30 minutes. Throw the grain and straw back into the center for complete separation of the grain. Then winnow in the traditional manner.

Donald A. Cook
Monmouth, Oregon

Brush Your Ears

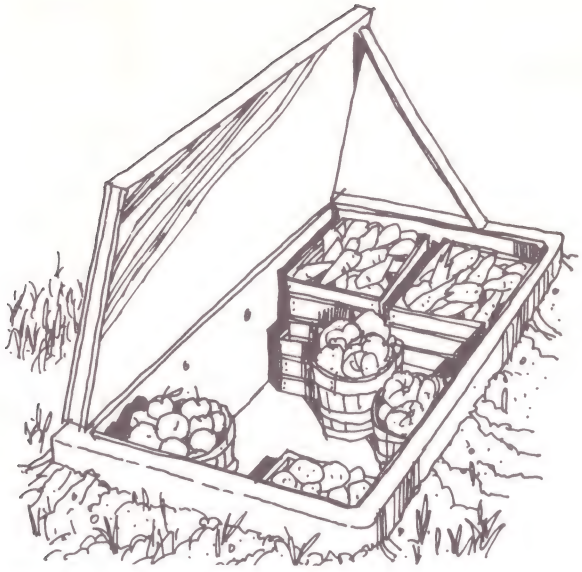
If you can or freeze a lot of corn, picking off the silks can get tiring. Every summer we use an old toothbrush for desilking our sweet corn, and it saves quite a bit of time.

Daniel Mills
Ewing, Virginia

Out with the Pits

I've found a quick, easy way to pit cherries. I use a plastic drinking-straw to push through each cherry where the stem was attached. The edge of the straw is sharp enough to cut right through the cherry. But since the straw is a little smaller than the cherry pit, it pushes the pit out. The cherries are left firm, with most of their juice in them, and not on you.

Judy Lee Lail
Connelly Springs, North Carolina



In-Ground Freezer

My neighbor came up with a great idea for storing vegetables. He put an old freezer (minus motor and door latch) in the ground, right up to the lid. Then he made a well-insulated cover for the top of the freezer. The first one worked so well that he put in another last year, and now we've got one and are planning to put a second in this summer. Finding an old freezer isn't too hard—just get in touch with an appliance dealer. Most will be happy to have you haul them off. Slope the ground around the freezer for water runoff, and you'll have an instant root cellar!

Garrett L. Van Beck
Plymouth, Illinois

Walnut Husker?

When my father and I were faced with six bushels of walnuts to hull, we discovered a great method of dealing with them. Someone had given my father an old John Deere corn sheller, so we figured that if it could shell corn, it could probably handle walnuts. And it did! With a little oiling, it worked great. One of us fed nuts into the machine while the other cranked the handle. It took about an hour to do a bushel. If you're not interested in cranking, a small motor can be hooked up to do the work. Then it's just a matter of throwing the walnuts down the chute. You can do a bushel in 20 minutes.

Vicky Bouldin
Lafayette, Indiana

Sunflower Scraper

To separate sunflower seeds from the flower head, scrape the head across an old washboard. Works like a charm.

Mitchell Grodd
Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

Blasted Frost

You can defrost your freezer in no time by placing a big, electric fan in front of it on a card table. For an even faster meltdown, try putting an electric heater behind the fan. The resulting warm air will blast out the frost before your frozen packages have a chance to dribble. Whatever you do in the process, don't forget to empty the drain pan.

J.W. Anderson
Newman, California

Root Washing Basket

Wash your root crops in a plastic clothes basket! Toss the produce into the basket, spray with a garden hose, rotate and shake the basket, then spray again. The tumbling action enables you to hit all sides of the vegetables with water, and off goes the dirt! The mud exits through the holes in the basket, and you're left with clean vegetables.

This system is particularly handy when you have large amounts of produce to clean, or when excess mud makes it unwise to wash in the kitchen sink.

Larry Servais
Green Bay, Wisconsin

Quicker Pitter

Paper clips, properly bent, make excellent cherry pitters that cost less than a penny. Open the paper clip so the small, hairpin piece can be pushed into the cherry. With a flick of the wrist, helped by a slight pinching team of index finger and thumb, the pit should pop right out. This nifty paper clip technique enabled two of us to pit 13 pounds of cherries in just one hour!

Suzanna Sawhill
Gold Hill, Oregon

Chapter 6

Tools

Steak out Weeds

My husband made a weeder/cultivator out of a two-pronged meat fork that had lost its handle. He used a dowel pin three-fourths inch in diameter and four feet long as a handle, but a broom handle could be used instead. He drilled a hole in one end of the dowel pin four inches deep and wide enough for the fork, filled the hole with epoxy glue, and inserted the fork. Now I have a tool for loosening the soil around my plants and pulling weeds without stooping.

Mrs. Alfred N. Nichols
Las Cruces, New Mexico

Garden Clubs

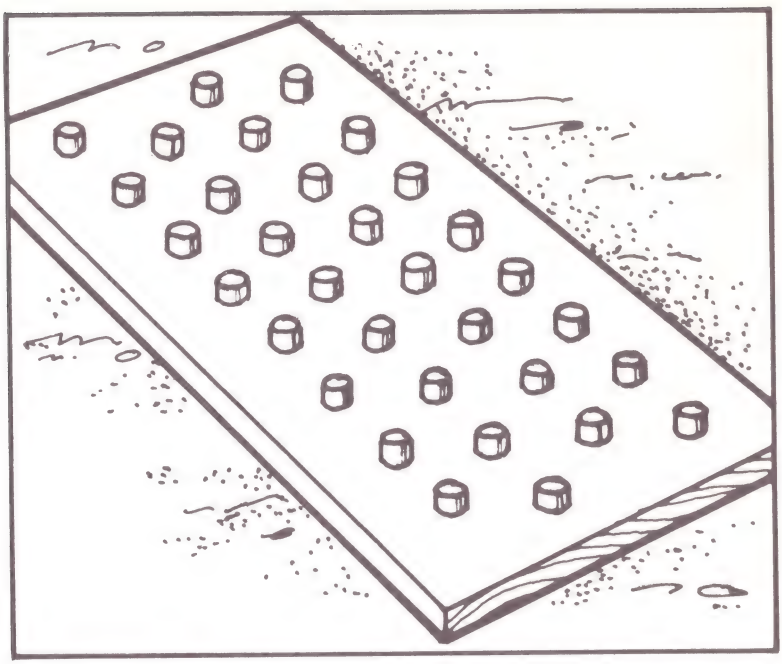
I recently retrieved an old golf bag, and bought a golf pullcart for a few dollars at a flea market. I put the bag on the cart and filled it with the tools I use most in the garden and yard—rake, shovel, hoe, edger, pitchfork, ax. In the bag's pockets, I put hand tools, plastic bags, string, etc. I attached my work gloves, plus paper bag for lightweight debris, with clothespins. There's a ready-made ring for a hand towel on all golf bags. Now when I go to the garden, I just pull my cart with me. Sure saves a lot of trips to the garage!

Janice Wells
Pensacola, Florida

Seed Packet Pockets

I got tired of losing seed packets in the garden, so I made a pair of tie-on utility pockets. I made the pockets out of heavy cotton cloth for easy washing, and made them roomy enough for the garden shears as well as plenty of seed packets. They're a real time-saver!

Jennifer Black
Roseburg, Oregon



Planting Board

I have gone one better on the dibble and made a planting board that gets my raised beds planted in no time, and the seeds are evenly spaced too! The board consists of four rows of eight dowels each. The dowels are equidistant within each row (two-and-seven-eighths inches apart), and the rows are equidistant from each other (two-and-one-half inches apart). The dowels in one row are staggered in relation to the dowels in the adjoining rows, with the result that the dowels are equidistant (two-and-seven-eighths inches) within and between rows. Each dowel is flat and one-half inch long, so when the board is pressed into the soil (I stand on mine) you get an impression of 32 flat-bottomed, equidistant holes one-half inch deep. (To get shallower holes for tiny seeds, just don't press as hard.) To make the board, cut a piece of one-half-inch (five-eighths-inch or three-fourths-inch will do) plywood to measure 10½-by-23½ inches. Cut 32½-inch lengths of five-eighths-inch-diameter dowel (one-half-inch- or three-fourths-inch-diameter will do). Be sure to make allowance for the cut. Glue and/or nail the dowels to the board. Coat the board with a preserver for longer life.

William R. Jahn
West Des Moines, Iowa

Sacked Out

When out gardening or doing other dirty work, we keep a pair of grocery bags by the door of the house. When a phone rings or other business takes us into the house, we slip our booted feet into the sacks, roll the tops toward each leg, and do what needs to be done. No more untying and retying shoes and boots, and no more dirty rugs! Plastic bags work well but are slippery; for wet feet, plastic bags inside paper grocery bags are best. Our children loves these "elephant feet."

Gerald R. Osborne
Kelso, Washington

Piped In

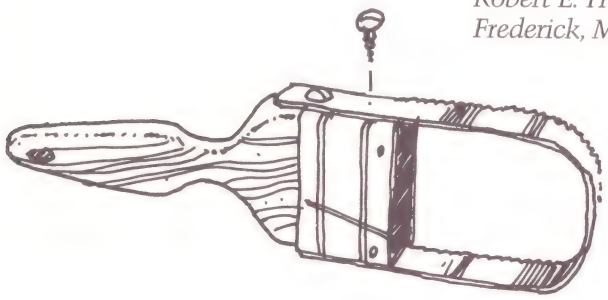
The tool I use to set tomato stakes makes the job so easy that everyone in the neighborhood borrows it each year. You can set about 100 stakes an hour. Just buy a three-foot length of two-and-three-eighths-inch-diameter galvanized pipe with a cap on one end at a hardware store. Put the stake in the pipe, and set it in place. Lift and release this ten-pound pipe three or four times, and your stake will be driven about two feet into the ground. Then lift the pipe off that stake and move on to the next.

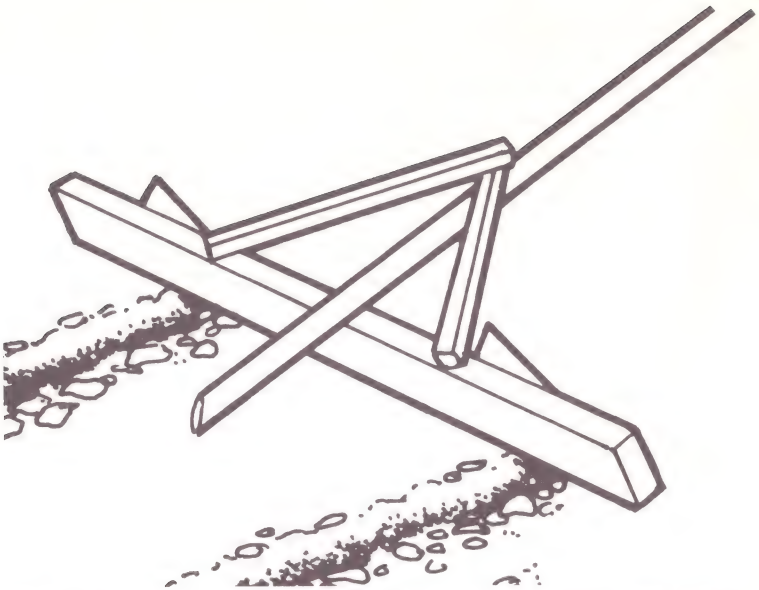
Yvonne S. Rozell
Columbus, Ohio

Hackbrush Weeder

Use an old paintbrush handle and a discarded hacksaw blade to make a weeder that's handy for working in small spaces. Use four screws, two to a side, to attach the blade to the handle.

Robert E. Harley
Frederick, Maryland





The Straight and Narrow Row

My husband Tom really believes in straight garden rows, so he invented a foolproof row-marker. The handle is a six-foot pole. About a foot up from the bottom of the pole, he fastened a 2-by-4-by-46-inch pine board. To the pine board he attached two diamond-shaped pieces of metal, although these could be made out of wood and sharpened into points. Tom bolted the metal diamonds onto the piece of pine, about 12 inches in from each end. Pieces of wood 1-by-1½-by-24 inches, attached to both the pine board and the pole, provide support. With this tool, you can mark two rows at once.

Shirley Bock Testi
Corry, Pennsylvania

Posthole Planter

While watching my wife use her bulb planter, I noticed that the holes she was making were of even space and depth, with little soil disturbance. A similar but larger tool would be perfect in my small raised-bed garden. Then I thought of my old fence-post digger. It worked perfectly, digging down deep into the subsoil quickly and easily.

Ronald Leroy
Holden, Massachusetts

Tomato Loopers?

This spring, I stumbled onto a time-saving technique for tying tomatoes to stakes. I use the nylon loops you buy in a dime store to make potholders. I slip each loop over the tomato stem, then hang it on a roofing nail in the stake. Because the loops are soft, they don't cut the plants, and they're strong enough to hold until fall. Then they slip off easily for fall cleanup.

John M. Stack
Indianapolis, Indiana

Glove Trap

My gardening gloves have always taken a beating. Until recently, they were likely to mildew in a forgotten corner of the utility room or dry out and crack in the shrubbery. I noticed my friend had the solution—a mousetrap! He had mounted an open trap on the wall and neatly snapped his gloves in place as he entered the house. This technique has given my gloves a new lease on life and saves me the frustration of a 15-minute search on the way to the garden.

Jean M. Lusk
Denham Springs, Louisiana

Bag Your Bagging Problems

This portable bag-holder is a time- and temper-saver if you've ever tried to hold a plastic bag with one hand and fill it with the other. During the growing season, I stand it in a sunny corner of the garden to collect spent plants and leaves for composting. In the fall, it's easy to position beside piles of leaves for transporting compost. In the winter, the unit disassembles and stores in a small place.

Materials needed are two eight-foot lengths of ¾-by-1¾-inch wood, three three-inch stove bolts (three-sixteenths-inch diameter), six washers and three wing nuts. My holder was designed for a standard plastic bag, but measurements can be adjusted.

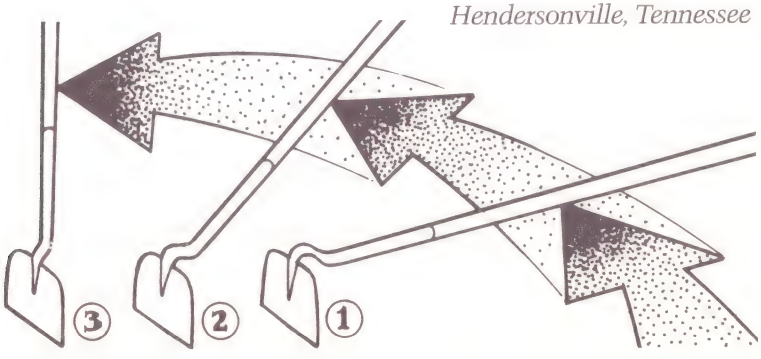
Cut three legs 34 inches long. The triangle top is made from three pieces 20 inches long. Ends of these top pieces are cut at an angle to fit tight to the legs. All pieces were drilled with holes slightly larger than the bolt diameters for easy assembly. Keep joints loose-fitting and stand it up before tightening the thumb-screws. Hang the bag in the opening and it's ready to serve you for years. It's a great late-winter project you'll finish easily in an evening.

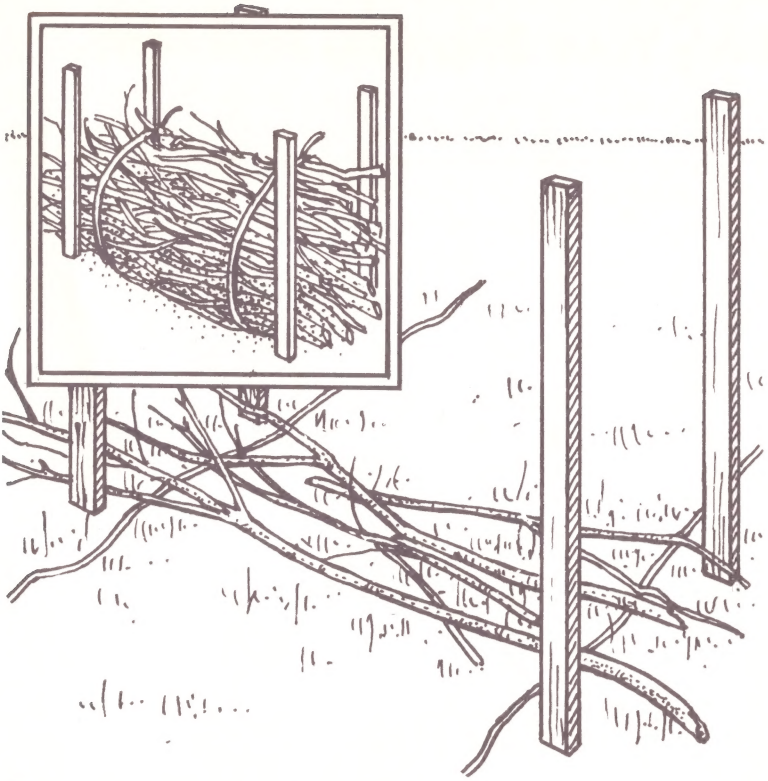
Walter Masson
Needham, Massachusetts

Hoe Remodeling

A scuffle hoe clears the ground of weeds three times faster than a garden hoe. And a scuffle hoe is easy to make from an old garden hoe. Put the blade of the garden hoe in a vise and bend the handle upwards, bending the shank. Go slowly, being careful not to break the weld between the blade and shank. Continue to bend the handle upward and over, until the blade will lie flat on the ground and the handle is at a comfortable angle. Be sure to maintain the squareness of the blade and handle. Sharpen the edge, and you're ready to hoe.

Harry Haberthear
Hendersonville, Tennessee





Pruning Stakeout

I've always enjoyed pruning my fruit trees and bushes, but collecting and getting rid of all the branches was another matter. Now it's easy. I drive two tall stakes about 15 inches apart, then two more four feet from the first pair. Then I lay twine on the ground just inside each set of stakes. As I prune, I put the branches in the trough until it's fairly full. I step on the pile to compress it, then tie the twine at each end. Instead of a pile of brush, I have neat bundles for kindling or disposal.

Larry Molinaro
Ambler, Pennsylvania

O4967